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Immediate Release

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Environment Department Alerts Doña Ana County Residents of Health Risks Associated with Dust Storms

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department's (NMED) Air Quality Bureau, the City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County wish to warn the citizens of Doña Ana County about the potential health risks associated with dust storms.

"Like your mother telling you to come in out of the rain before you catch a cold, the fact that dust storms pose a health risk seems obvious," said Jim Norton, Director of NMED's Environmental Protection Division. "But sometimes we all need to be reminded that moms are always right and even the most obvious risk can still hurt you."

Doña Ana County typically experiences one to ten days every spring when dust storms cause exceedances of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for airborne particulate matter 10 microns or less in size, which is about 1/7 the diameter of a human hair.

Dust storms can cause a number of serious health problems and can make some health problems worse. Dust can irritate the lungs and trigger allergic reactions, as well as asthma attacks. For people who already suffer from these conditions, dust can cause serious breathing problems. Dust can also cause coughing, wheezing and runny noses. Breathing large amounts of dust for prolonged periods can result in chronic breathing and lung problems.

Breathing too much dust can potentially harm anyone. However, the following groups run the highest risk of being adversely affected by a dust storm.

- Infants, children, and teens
- The elderly
- People with respiratory conditions like asthma, bronchitis and emphysema
- People with heart disease
- Pregnant women

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As your mom would say, the best precaution to take during a dust storm is simply to avoid going outside. If you must go out, spend as little time outside as possible, avoid hard exercise and cover your nose and mouth to provide protection from larger dust particles.

For more information on the risks associated with dust storms please call 1-800-224-7009 or visit the NMED's website at www.nmenv.state.nm.us, click on "Environment Department Organization" and then on "Air Quality Bureau".

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